

The National Historic Landmarks Assistance Initiative

The genesis of the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) program was the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which directs the Secretary of the Interior to study, document, and designate nationally-significant historic sites. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 expanded the Secretary's responsibilities to promote preservation, declaring that it is the policy of the federal government to provide leadership to and encouragement in the preservation of prehistoric and historic resources of federal agencies, American Indian tribes, state and local governments, private entities, and individuals.

The lead in the national historic preservation program was delegated to the National Park

Service (NPS), which promotes historic preservation through a number of programs, including listing properties in the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks program. Properties listed in the National Register may be of local, state, or national significance. Properties designated as NHLs are limited to those of national significance, and must be designated by the Secretary of the Interior. To date, 2,210 buildings, districts, structures, sites, and objects have been designated as NHLs, embodying and exemplifying important national aspects of American history and prehistory.

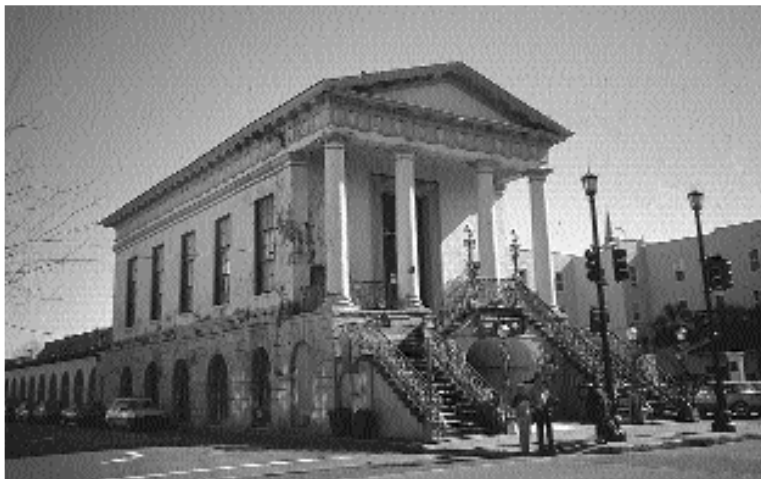
The NHL program is administered through the National Historic Landmarks Survey, which studies and documents historic and archeological

properties, and the National Historic Landmarks Assistance Initiative, which monitors the condition of designated NHLs and provides technical assistance to promote their preservation. The NPS provides technical assistance, including training in, and information concerning, professional preservation methods and techniques and the administration of the historic preservation program at the federal, state, and local levels, and works with public and private partners to promote stewardship of the nation's cultural resources.

Endangered NHLs

An important facet of the NHL Assistance Initiative is monitoring and reporting on the condition of the nation's Landmarks. To prepare the report, NPS field staff consult State Historic Preservation Offices, site managers, and owners of NHLs to ascertain their condition. The report identifies the NHL's significance, threats to its integrity—the characteristics that help us understand its significance—and recommendations for its preservation. This report is sent

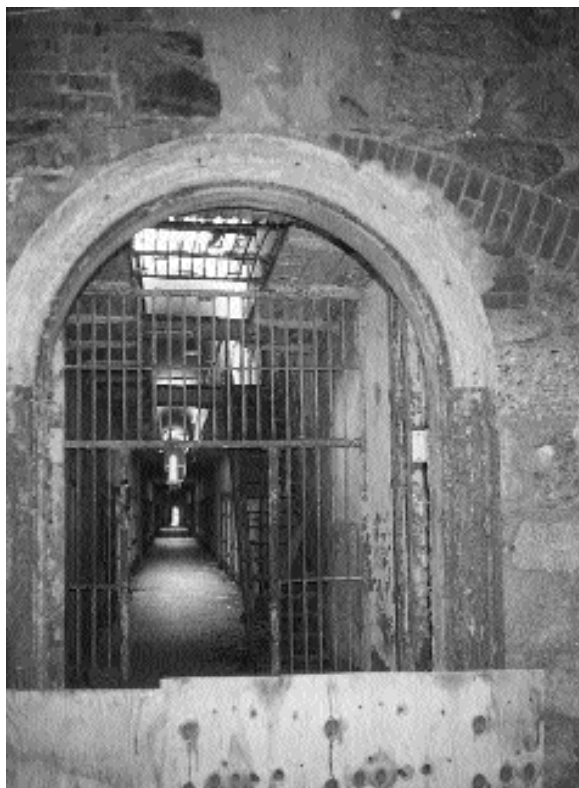
Market Hall and Sheds NHL, Charleston, South Carolina. Market Hall, built in 1841, is one of a small number of 19th-century market complexes extant in the United States. The NPS provided a condition assessment report used by the city in its subsequent restoration of this NHL. Photo by Lee Nelson.



Union Station NHL, St. Louis, Missouri. The trainshed of this impressive High Victorian station was, when constructed in the early 1890s, the largest continuous train shed in the country. Innovative adaptive re-use, using the NPS-administered historic tax credits, allowed retention of this essential component of the NHL.



One of the radial arms of Eastern State Penitentiary NHL, Philadelphia, PA. Eastern State, built in the 1820s, was a model prison for its time, built with the aim of reforming prisoners through isolation which would encourage them to meditate on their behavior and repent. It has an active friends' group which is seeking a viable adaptive reuse for the buildings.



The blockhouse at the British Camp, American and English Camps NHL, San Juan Island, WA. This Blockhouse was restored by the NPS, but continues to be threatened by deterioration caused by tidal inundation.



Mound at Holly Bluff NHL, Yazoo County, MS. Land levelling to allow the use of large agricultural machines has destroyed many Native American archeological sites. Courtesy NPS.



to Congress and is used by policy makers, owners, and friends of NHLs to promote their preservation. For the last 10 years, approximately 6% of NHLs have been found to be seriously damaged or threatened, and an additional 10% potentially endangered.

The number of NHLs newly identified as endangered usually is fairly close to—and in two recent years actually matches—the number removed from danger each year. Approximately 80% of threatened and damaged NHLs are deteriorated; erosion is also a major threat, particularly to archeological sites. The process of identifying and prioritizing needed treatments for deteriorated properties and fundraising to carry them out is often time consuming. The average length of time a property is listed as damaged or threatened is four and a half years, but some properties have been listed for over 10 years. Deterioration can eventually become irreversible and an important example of the nation's heritage can be lost forever.

Of the NHLs listed as damaged in 1996, 37 have been listed continuously for 10 or more years. Of these, 14 are archeological sites, 12 are historic districts, and 11 are buildings.

In order to facilitate repairs of damaged NHLs, the NPS has provided condition assessments of over 92 properties. These condition assessments are based on careful professional analysis of the physical condition of the buildings. They describe existing conditions and prioritize treatments needed to stabilize or repair the buildings, with estimated costs of the work. These can be used by owners to seek funding and direct necessary work on the buildings. While in recent years the NPS has not had the funding to carry out as many condition assessments, they remain an important preservation tool.

Another widespread threat to the integrity of NHLs is incompatible construction or repairs. This can often be prevented by education on the importance of preserving a property's materials, features, spaces and setting. The NPS prepares and distributes technical publications* that explain how to preserve, repair, and adapt historic properties for

Amana Colonies NHL, Iowa County, IA. The Amana Colonies were established by the utopian Amana Society in the 1850s. Many of the buildings are still in their original use; others, like this Bakery, which is now a bed and breakfast, have been adapted to keep them economically viable.



Amana Colonies NHL, Iowa County, IA. Incompatible signage disrupts the historic atmosphere of the NHL.



Vieux Carré NHL, New Orleans, LA. The Vieux Carré, an 85-block area of old New Orleans, retains most of the original city plan laid out in 1721. It contains a variety of distinctive historical architectural styles. Skyscrapers built adjacent to the historic district provide a jarring note to the historic district.



new uses in ways that preserve their integrity. Income-producing historic properties which are rehabilitated according to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* may be able to benefit from a 20% tax credit. This program is also administered by the NPS.

Technical Assistance to Owners

The NPS trains owners and managers of NHLs through conferences and workshops across the country. Areas of training may include: identifying sources of financial assistance and writing historic preservation grant applications; technical preservation techniques and standards; information on preservation organizations, legislation affecting historic preservation, or marketing NHLs that are open to the public. The NPS may offer assistance in improving the historical documentation of a Landmark, in identifying contributing structures, or in defining or updating boundaries if needed. The NPS architects may assist owners with architectural design assistance or review, or planning for adaptive reuse for historic buildings, including meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for

Historic Rehabilitation and qualifying for federal rehabilitation tax credits. State Historic Preservation Offices also have architects trained in these areas who can offer assistance to owners of historic properties.

This spring, the NPS asked owners and managers of NHLs what services and information were of most use to them. As could be predicted, raising funds to maintain, repair, and operate their historic properties was the predominant concern. Information and assistance on marketing their properties as tourist destinations and condition assessments of properties were also very important to many owners. The next most desired services were information on preservation law that might affect historic properties and information on available grants and on grant writing.

Over half of the owners who responded said that their NHLs had been listed in the annual report to Congress on endangered and damaged NHLs. Half of these had used the report to publicize the importance and needs of the NHL, and 25% had used it in fundraising to preserve their

Resurrection Manor NHL, St. Mary's County, MD. This 17th-century farmhouse belonged to the grandfather of Lord Charles Cornwallis, British forces commander during the American Revolutionary War. It has been allowed to deteriorate by its private owner. The federal government cannot mandate that a private owner maintain his property, even if it is an NHL.



properties. Of those who used it in fundraising, 35% had sought private grants and 31% state grants. Nine percent had used the report in seeking protective legislation for their NHLs.

Sixty-nine percent of the owners were interested in a conference to meet with other owners and experts. They were most interested in the topics of fund raising, preservation issues and technical assistance, accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act, condition assessments, stronger laws to protect historic buildings, and a crafts/trades registry.

The NPS asked owners how many had access to the Internet and the World Wide Web, since sharing of information via these media is fast and inexpensive. The NPS already has a cul-

tural resources web site <<http://www.cr.nps.gov>> and sponsors an Internet discussion group for owners. The web site has information on the many cultural resource programs of the National Park Service and its preservation partners that can provide assistance to owners outside the National Park Service itself. The discussion group allows owners to ask questions and share information among themselves. The NPS is currently a little ahead of the curve, however. As of March, 45% of the NHL owners could access

the Internet and 42% could access the World Wide Web. As more and more people gain access to these powerful communication tools, owners will be able to communicate with each other and the NPS much more efficiently than is possible now.

When asked whether they would like information about their NHL posted on the Web as part of an educational effort by the NHL Assistance Initiative, three quarters of the respondents said yes. Thirty-six percent of respondents either have or are planning their own web site,

The National Historic Landmarks Assistance Initiative has three goals:

- *to preserve NHLs;*
- *to improve services to owners of NHLs; and*
- *to build a constituency for the preservation of America's cultural resources through public education.*

and would like to be linked to the NPS NHL web home page when it is developed. Such linkages will help the public to learn more about American's NHLs and help those that are open to the public to publicize their importance and how to find them.

Sixty-four percent of the respondents indicated they would be interested in an owners' organization that would provide a framework for networking, sharing ideas for preservation, joining together for marketing, etc. If established as an independent organization, such an organization could also identify and promote legislative measures that would help the preservation of NHLs for future generations. The NPS can help put owners in touch with each other and provide technical information.

Cripple Creek NHL, Cripple Creek, CO. Gambling introduced into historic mining towns such as Cripple Creek has often resulted in the gutting or demolition of all but the facades of the historic buildings.



Photos by author unless otherwise noted.

Owners were also overwhelmingly (84%) interested in receiving a newsletter that would cover areas such as historic preservation news and legislation, case studies of existing NHLs, fundraising and marketing strategies, and updates on new NHLs.

The NPS will use the findings of the owners' survey to guide its technical assistance activities in the future. Preservation professionals located in NPS offices across the country (see accompanying box) work with owners and friends of National Historic Landmarks, and with other preservation organizations to promote the preservation of these

nationally-significant properties which embody our shared heritage.

Note

* NPS Heritage Preservation Services has produced a large number of technical publications over 25 years of providing leadership and guidance in historic preservation. For catalogs, phone 202-343-9583 or email <hps-info@nps.gov>. Publications and video tapes for training are listed on the World Wide Web at <www.cr.nps.gov>.

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